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Fiftieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 536th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 5 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. AL KHORRAM (Vice-Chairman) (Islamic Republic of Iran)

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In the absence of Mr. Pérez-Hernández (Spain), Mr. Al Khorram (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

ANNUAL THEME: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP TO ENSURE PROTECTION, ALSO IN RELATION TO SECURITY (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/AC.96/923)

1. Ms. ANDERSSON (Sweden), associating her delegation with the earlier statement made by Finland on behalf of the European Union, said that untold suffering had been inflicted on displaced persons because they were not adequately protected under international law. Her Government was concerned at continuing reports of violence against refugees in East Timor. The violation of the recently agreed principles for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan was also alarming. While acknowledging the long-standing hospitality of the Islamic Republic of Iran in hosting one of the largest single refugee populations, her delegation was disturbed by reports of continuing deportations of Afghan refugees to areas where their safety could not be guaranteed. Another refugee emergency was currently unfolding in Chechnya and Sweden welcomed the fact that the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had been able to send relief convoys to the area.

2. Humanitarian action and protection were inseparable. Only by granting uprooted people access to safe and impartial protection could the international community comply with its universal commitment to human dignity. The authority of UNHCR stemmed from effective partnership with Governments, which should endeavour to promote an international climate of compliance. Partnership for the promotion of protection and security had two facets, namely, advocacy among States in cooperation with UNHCR for further improvements in the refugee regime, and technical assistance to countries unable to meet necessary safety guarantees. UNHCR's "Reach Out" programme was an example of an initiative to promote broader dissemination of protection principles.

3. Irregular armed groups posed a particular challenge because they had the potential to cause serious threats to the security of refugees, host communities and whole regions. Closer cooperation between UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would be an appropriate way of addressing the problem. Moreover, Sweden had provided police officers to enhance security in refugee camps in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Republic of Tanzania. The lessons learned from such deployments should be analysed carefully. The time was also ripe to give consideration to the establishment of a peacekeeping presence to ensure that refugee camps were free from infiltration by armed elements. It was unrealistic to expect UNHCR to ensure security and preserve the strictly civilian character of refugee settlements infested by armed groups. Improved refugee registration would go some way towards alleviating the problem.

4. It was becoming increasingly necessary to invest in a variety of security mechanisms such as staff training, hiring local police, outposting security officers and taking precautions with regard to transport and staff accommodation. UNHCR's donor partners should be more generous in providing

adequate and predictable funding for such initiatives and the higher operational costs should be integrated into UNHCR's reporting in a transparent manner.

5. Other areas of interest and concern to her Government were UNHCR's partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the specific problems facing refugee women and children and internally displaced persons and forward planning for the management of large-scale operations in complex cooperation with diverse partners.

6. Protection was the backbone of the High Commissioner's mandate, yet it was less visible than relief and therefore ran the risk of being marginalized in financial terms. Sweden strongly endorsed the budget reform of UNHCR; such reform would create greater transparency in resource allocation, provide a better overview of priorities and establish the necessary flexibility for adequate response. UNHCR should also give credit to its partners, both refugee host countries and donors. It was vital that partnership should be made more visible.

7. Mr. HARAGUCHI (Japan) said that peace-building in post-conflict situations included human rights protection, the restoration of security, demobilization and political and economic reconstruction. If any of those elements was lacking, conflict would resume. The partnership of various actors outside the sphere of humanitarian operations was therefore vital for refugee protection. Moreover, complementary relationships between various humanitarian organizations should be developed in order to minimize duplication and accidental oversights.

8. The "Brookings Process" initiated by UNHCR and the World Bank was an attempt to bridge the gap between humanitarian emergency relief and long-term development. Japan strongly endorsed the process and intended to participate in it actively; his Government would also like to see further enhancement of the cooperative relationship between UNHCR and other agencies.

9. A spirit of partnership with host countries was also vital. Recognizing the heavy financial burdens created by massive refugee inflows, Japan had announced its intention to allocate $60 million to Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. His Government called on the international community to share the economic and social burdens of refugee host countries. NGOs also had an essential role to play in partnership efforts.

10. Japan supported the "ladder of options" concept of refugee camp security currently being discussed by the Secretary-General, UNHCR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and hoped that it would result in effective measures. The safety of humanitarian workers was also a key area of concern. His delegation strongly encouraged all Governments to accede to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. Japan had also contributed $1 million for the security training of personnel.

11. Finally, his Government was pleased to announce its latest financial contribution of $27.3 million for the alleviation of refugee crises in the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Horn of Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

12. Mr. QIAO Zonghuai (China) said that, although UNHCR and its partners had dealt successfully with a number of refugee crises in the past year, the situation in certain regions of the world remained grim. In the Balkans, the recent humanitarian disaster had been exacerbated by the belligerence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

13. The concept of partnership involved cooperation and burden-sharing in equal measure. Developed countries had a responsibility to contribute adequate funds. Partnership also implied a two-way relationship between refugees and asylum countries. Asylum countries should fully respect refugees' rights and create the conditions for them to lead normal lives, while, in return, refugees should abide by the laws of asylum countries. It was also incumbent on developed countries to waive highly restrictive asylum policies and accept more refugees for resettlement. Furthermore, all refugees should be treated equally; double standards or bias were unacceptable.

14. More efforts should be made to address the root causes of refugee problems. Ethnic strife, territorial disputes and external intervention had all triggered refugee outflows in the 1990s and mass exoduses had destabilized entire regions. To avoid such disasters, Governments must adhere to the principles of equal sovereignty, mutual respect, non-interference in domestic affairs and peaceful settlement of disputes. Countries of origin should also take responsibility for dealing with their own refugee problems. When political and economic conditions permitted, they should take back refugees and encourage their reintegration into society.

15. For its part, the Chinese Government had taken and would continue to take measures to resolve the problem of the 280,000 Indo-Chinese refugees currently in China, whether through voluntary return, repatriation pursuant to negotiations with the country of origin or naturalization.

16. Mr. SO Kam Shing (China), speaking as the representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, said it was well known that Hong Kong was home to a number of Vietnamese refugees. Over the years, their numbers had steadily declined as a result of successful asylum, repatriation and resettlement programmes; currently, there were just 970 refugees and 580 migrants in Hong Kong. Past success did not mean, however, that the task of resettlement was completed and UNHCR still had a valuable and vital role to play in the Special Administrative Region.

17. Given Hong Kong's extraordinarily high population density, the Hong Kong Government still hoped to resettle most of the remaining refugees overseas. He appealed to the international community to settle the outstanding amount of $150 million which UNHCR had advanced for the care and maintenance of the Vietnamese migrants and to reconsider the cases of the remaining refugees generously and sympathetically.

18. Mrs. TAGLIAVINI (Switzerland) said her country considered that partnership ought to improve the quality of refugee protection, enable UNHCR to implement, and secure greater respect for, its mandate, increase the responsibility of States and draw Governments' attention to their fundamental duty to protect refugees. UNHCR was thus an essential actor in the phases of prevention, emergency assistance and rehabilitation.

19. In the preventive phase, the main responsibility of States was to guarantee their nationals respect for the law. Dialogue between UNHCR and States had to be encouraged by the international community because UNHCR had an important role to play in collecting information and warning Governments about the possibility of large-scale population movements. To that end, UNHCR should establish a partnership with other actors such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, OSCE and national and international non-governmental organizations specializing in human rights. At the same time, its readiness for emergency action had to be constantly reviewed and adjusted to deal with potential threats. One such partnership between UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration and several Central Asian States involved in the CIS Conference follow-up process was helping to improve the protection of asylum-seekers at the national and regional levels.

20. In emergencies, partnership had to be framed by a common strategy where the specific mandates of all humanitarian actors could be turned to good account, since unhealthy competition among them obviously reduced the efficiency of any operation.

21. Rapid mobilization might also require military support for humanitarian action, but such support must not encroach on the protection mandate of civilian humanitarian organizations and could be considered only in certain fields.

22. In order to prevent too many actors from overcrowding operations in emergency situations, a code of conduct should be adopted along the lines of that of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs during emergency relief operations. Her country believed that the protection of internally displaced persons should be based on the mandate entrusted to the International Committee of the Red Cross, by the Geneva Conventions.

23. In the next phase of an emergency situation, UNHCR should be joined by other competent actors with specific mandates so that it could gradually withdraw from operations and hand over responsibility to development agencies in cooperation with human rights organizations and representatives of civil society, which were key partners in repatriation operations and could help lay the foundations for economic development and the rule of law.

24. Training was essential if humanitarian action was to have an impact and be effective. In view of its expert knowledge, UNHCR must actively contribute to efforts to promote basic training so that operating methods could be shared with other organizations. Joint courses on natural disaster management had proved their worth during the recent earthquakes in Turkey, Greece and Taiwan and shown that such training could considerably heighten the effectiveness of humanitarian action in complex emergency situations.

25. Switzerland welcomed the recent debates in the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and would continue to support UNHCR's unflagging efforts on behalf of refugees.

26. Mr. MGEJA (Tanzania) said that, because his country had had first-hand experience of the complications arising from the infiltration of armed

elements in refugee camps, it welcomed the debate on strengthening partnerships in order to provide security and agreed that partnerships connoted a shared objective and the desire to join forces to achieve a particular goal. Co-responsibility included a proportional sharing of the costs and benefits accruing from partnership, since refugees were an international responsibility which had to be faced by the community of nations. Partnerships were necessary because it was impossible for all States and actors to play the same role and they were a way of tapping each organization's expertise.

27. States were the primary custodians of the protection regime, but, unfortunately, developing countries continued to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden of welcoming refugees and sharing their meagre resources with them. His country had been hosting refugees for over 40 years and had never imposed quota restrictions on them.

28. The local population in countries of asylum was a crucial partner in the provision of protection, but the prolonged presence of refugees in areas where life was a constant struggle unleashed tensions which put Governments under pressure to reconsider their commitment to the granting of asylum, especially when there was a perception that the international community was not exerting enough influence on refugee-producing countries to put their houses in order.

29. As it had become increasingly difficult for his country to deal with refugees without addressing security concerns, it had requested assistance from the international community in order to maintain the civilian character of refugee camps through a new improved security package.

30. However, double standards were being applied. There was an outpouring of assistance to refugees in some parts of the world, while, strangely enough, other regions with similar problems received less attention. UNHCR's restricted mandate was also a limitation on partnerships. For example, conflict resolution lay outside that mandate, yet conflicts were resulting in the infiltration of refugee camps by armed elements. That realization had prompted the countries of the Great Lakes region to propose the establishment of a mechanism to separate armed groups from the civilian population and they therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendation that an international mechanism should be introduced to safeguard security and neutrality in refugee camps.

31. International interest and assistance for prolonged refugee crises were short-lived, however, and, once media attention had shifted, refugee outflows were forgotten and the problem was left to the hapless countries of asylum.

32. Although, technically, UNHCR's mandate did not extend beyond protection and repatriation, in practice, there was a strong link between successful repatriation, sound resettlement and reconstruction policy. It was therefore necessary to examine how UNHCR's role in that respect could be expanded.

33. While local integration was a solution to some refugee problems, it was not feasible if the numbers involved were too large. Voluntary repatriation therefore seemed to be the best solution and there might be more room for third-country resettlement if the more affluent members of the international

community were to apply more flexible refugee acceptance quotas. At the same time, refugees were under an obligation to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their status and should not terrorize their hosts or engage in criminal or political activities.

34. There was also a need to address the root causes of population displacement in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The phenomenon of economic refugees required examination and its implications had to be fully assessed.

35. If partnerships were properly built, the actors concerned would be more willing to provide asylum and receive more refugees.

36. Mr. MORJANE (Tunisia) said that the choice of the annual theme was judicious and well-timed, as it was set against a backdrop where conflicts were causing such large-scale movements of refugees that it was virtually impossible for a single humanitarian actor to cope with the complexity of situations and ensure refugee protection. Other international bodies therefore had to join in a partnership with UNHCR. The report by the Secretariat in document A/AC.96/923 would serve as a useful basis for the discussion of the theme.

37. Since refugee protection and its coordination had been discussed at length in the past, partnership must now be seen as a means of avoiding duplication of effort and the wastage of resources. The wide range of partnerships established by UNHCR was valuable, as they included Governments, representatives of civil society and refugees themselves. In that context, his delegation welcomed the newly concluded partnership with the Organization of African Unity.

38. For Tunisia, the PARinAC process was the finest example of a practical partnership between NGOs and UNHCR and it had to be revitalized and adapted to new threats to the security of refugees. UNHCR partnerships with private industry might also offer solutions to specific, delicate problems. His delegation considered that UNHCR should try to establish partnerships that focused more on the international community's current priorities and concerns. UNHCR's impartiality and neutrality might, however, be a stumbling block to the establishment of partnerships for the solution of the growing number of problems which also had a political and military dimension. It therefore had to interpret its mandate broadly and flexibly.

39. Since the safety of refugees was an integral part of overall refugee protection and UNHCR was poorly equipped to deal with threats to refugees and the lack of security in camps, partnership was essential in that regard, especially as humanitarian personnel had become the target of attacks and kidnapping.

40. The international community must not lose interest in the humanitarian problems stemming from never-ending wars and UNHCR's fiftieth anniversary should be an opportunity to focus serious attention on that question.

41. Mr. BRYLLE (Denmark) said it was clear that there were core tasks which had to remain the exclusive responsibility of UNHCR and that it was absolutely necessary for UNHCR to make the building of partnerships an integral element of its strategy to meet current challenges.

42. The Danish Government fully supported efforts to mobilize the resources of UNHCR partners through the PARinAC process. Since 1991, the Danish Refugee Council had been closely cooperating with UNHCR on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding designed to support and strengthen the UNHCR response mechanism in emergencies. The Danish Emergency Management Agency had likewise assisted UNHCR on several occasions.

43. Denmark took a very strong interest in the security of relief personnel, which was frequently at risk, and strongly deplored the increasing disregard for human life in conflicts.

44. As a partner of UNHCR, the Danish Government had channelled a significant share of its humanitarian aid budget to the organization's operations, but it attached great importance to a fairer distribution of the burden of financing UNHCR, so that financial support would reflect a country's ability to contribute.

45. Kosovo had represented a major challenge for UNHCR but, despite partly justified initial criticism, UNHCR had overcome the difficulties. Following the return of most of the refugees, UNHCR still had a decisive role to play in Kosovo. Denmark itself would be placing greater emphasis on support for reconstruction in the western Balkans and expected to provide some US$ 120 million in 2000.

46. With UNHCR's new budget format, it was now even more important to strengthen evaluation activities as that would enable UNHCR to demonstrate the quality and efficiency of its operations. It was vital for UNHCR to continue to receive sufficient unearmarked resources; staff allocations should, if necessary, be supplemented by secondments from member States.

47. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) said that outbreaks of armed conflicts and the seriousness of natural disasters in the past year had exposed the limitations of the humanitarian intervention system and the unequal treatment accorded to different humanitarian crises by the international community. Human suffering was unacceptable wherever it occurred. It was more important than ever for all those involved in protection, assistance, prevention and the search for lasting solutions to understand their roles and responsibilities. He congratulated UNHCR on its contribution to the debate on partnership - the cornerstone of the entire system of humanitarian intervention.

48. While various forms of partnership were essential in order to cope with the complexities of refugee situations, partnership should confine itself to humanitarian issues and States and NGOs must therefore choose their partners with that in mind. In its role as coordinator, UNHCR established links with partners at various levels and of varying kinds. That showed humanitarian action had ceased to be the domain of humanitarian specialists alone and other institutional actors could no longer remain uninvolved.

49. The alarming statistics produced by UNHCR reflected not only the urgent need to develop sustainable means of intervention and mobilization, but also the fact that emergency situations were becoming increasingly numerous. The refugee problem had many dimensions and required a concerted, coordinated approach. In an ever more interdependent world, partnership was central,

particularly in the key areas of international protection and security; effectiveness demanded coherence and the setting of specific goals, if host, transit and resettlement countries were to see the exercise as a collective act of solidarity rather than purely in terms of duties and obligations.

50. Algeria would like the system of protection and security to be strengthened through partnership and national capacity-building. In the area of asylum, partnership should focus on the processing of applications for refugee status in accordance with international and regional standards.

51. Algeria's own experience of partnership operations included work with UNHCR, WFP, UNDP and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as well as the Governments concerned, in arranging voluntary repatriation for displaced persons from Mali and Niger and in assisting refugees from Western Sahara. Algeria's cooperation with UNHCR in Western Sahara had been particularly constructive. Nevertheless, the draft protocol governing planning for refugee repatriation and the draft plan of action for measures aimed at creating confidence and trust within the Tindouf refugee camps and the Territory of Western Sahara, both of which had been prepared by UNHCR, were still at the negotiation stage and serious political obstacles still stood in the way of significant progress with the United Nations implementation plan for Western Sahara.

52. Mr. KIDWAI (Pakistan) said that, with diminishing resources, UNHCR could no longer be expected to deal with refugee crises alone. The question of partnership, in the context of financial and physical burden-sharing, was therefore of great importance.

53. Pakistan itself was looking to partnership with the international community and NGOs, based on the principle of burden-sharing, in order to ensure the protection and security of approximately 1.5 million Afghan refugees who were still in Pakistan. International assistance for Afghan refugees had dried up, leaving Pakistan to cope largely on its own. The task had been made formidable by the discontinuation of WFP food assistance and the phasing out of UNHCR's care and maintenance programme. Since their basic needs were not being adequately catered for, large numbers of refugees were moving out of the camps to urban centres in search of work, thereby creating administrative, economic, security and social problems and altering the demographic balance. However, although it was true that the patience of local people had been stretched, his delegation did not agree with the UNHCR's 1999 Mid-Year Progress Report, which gave an impression of a pattern of fear and intimidation. Pakistan was making every effort to ensure the dignity, protection and security of Afghan refugees.

54. The economic cost to Pakistan of hosting the Afghan refugees had been incalculable. The infrastructure had been seriously damaged and entire forests had disappeared, while education and health were under severe strain. Even repatriated Afghan refugees returned to Pakistan in search of work. Pakistan had treated the Afghan refugees in exemplary fashion, throughout their long stay, as UNHCR had acknowledged. But local integration was not an option for such large numbers. Sustainable refugee returns could be guaranteed, however, only if the international community helped in rebuilding those parts of Afghanistan where peace had been restored.

55. To be successful, partnerships must take account of the concerns of host developing countries. He made the following recommendations for ensuring the continuing protection of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, involving the international community, UNHCR, NGOs and the Government of Pakistan: UNHCR should attract resources for the development of income-generating projects and the reconstruction of peaceful areas inside Afghanistan; UNHCR and WFP should resume their assistance for Afghan refugees in Pakistan; the international community must share the burden, in both material and human terms; grass-roots NGOs, which had been doing commendable work for the refugees and in Afghanistan itself, should receive financial support from the international community for their work in delivering food, health care, education and drinking water, and in forestry.

56. Mr. AMORIM (Brazil) said that UNHCR must maintain its non-partisan, impartial status, but should not shy away from attempting to come to grips with new security challenges that intersected with humanitarian activity. In dialogue with the Security Council, it should aim at mutual reinforcement and not risk transforming the Council into a humanitarian agency or UNHCR into a political body; his delegation therefore believed that the Security Council's regular briefings by UNHCR should be public. In the same vein, UNHCR's link with the Economic and Social Council deserved to be valued and highlighted in the context of post-conflict recovery and peace-building.

57. Of special relevance to the Committee's discussions was the Secretary-General's emphasis on the need for consistent responses to emergencies throughout the world and for clear, multilaterally agreed rules governing those responses. Significant developments had been taking place in Latin America, for example, notably with regard to Guatemalan refugees in Mexico and Brazil's own arrangements for refugees, in the shape of the new National Commission for Refugees (CONARE), partnerships with civil society and the recent signing by the Brazilian Government and UNHCR of a framework agreement for refugee resettlement, in preparation for a pilot programme for refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Brazil also supported Colombian and Venezuelan initiatives, and UNHCR involvement, in dealing with Colombian refugees.

58. Against a background of crises in Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Angola, it was essential that UNHCR's partnerships with OAU and SADC should be strengthened in order to produce results. Greater awareness of the acute problems being faced in Africa was, however, equally important in order to boost the provision of financial and material resources.

59. In the context of Kosovo, it was particularly significant that, under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the use of military force on humanitarian grounds must be reserved for extreme situations, lest it affect the impartiality of humanitarian workers. When agencies such as UNHCR acted in partnership with Security Council-authorized military operations, coordination was paramount. That was not the case, however, of operations for which consent had not been given, since humanitarian interventions under military protection would not be seen by all parties as neutral. A particularly sensitive question was whether impartial humanitarian agencies could operate satisfactorily in partnership with military alliances, especially where there was no clear Security Council mandate.

60. Brazil was profoundly disturbed by the grave situation in East Timor. His delegation supported the objectives of the High Commissioner's operational concept, particularly the aim of finding durable solutions for those in refugee-like situations outside East Timor, including voluntary return, local settlement or relocation, based on freedom of choice. Vigilance would be required to ensure that those victimized for exercising their political rights were not victimized once more as they sought to rebuild their future. Brazil would remain engaged in United Nations efforts to assist East Timor's transition to independence in accordance with the will of its people.

61. He paid tribute to UNHCR's staff, noting that it was those such as UNHCR, with a consistent humanitarian record, who would have to ensure that international action conformed to the legal and philosophical tenets governing collective humanitarian responsibility.

62. Mr. NCHOLU (Lesotho) said that the decrease in the number of refugees in Lesotho over the past few years did not mean that his country had closed its doors to new asylum-seekers and refugees. As a third world country facing economic development problems, Lesotho wholeheartedly supported the theme of "strengthening partnership to ensure protection, also in relation to security". Non-governmental organizations had been the first to provide assistance to refugees in Lesotho in the early 1960s, negotiating with the Government on refugee protection issues, as well as providing material assistance. In the light of that experience, his country, which had since ratified the relevant United Nations and OAU conventions, attached particular importance to strengthening partnership to ensure protection and hoped that the consideration of that theme would lead to closer cooperation and understanding, thereby promoting the welfare of all of mankind.

63. Mr. GOAGOSEB (Namibia) said that the process of strengthening partnership, already begun in the SADC region under the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1996, could not be dissociated from the concept of burden-sharing and the question of countries of first asylum. The economic and social consequences of hosting refugees were particularly serious for developing countries whose resources were not sufficient to sustain their own nationals, not to mention unplanned refugee influxes. Namibia was one of many African countries which were, despite their fragile economies and weak resource bases, hosting large numbers of refugees. Increased international assistance was therefore of the essence.

64. Namibia had acceded to all relevant international instruments and was pursuing an open-door policy which attracted asylum-seekers from as far away as Liberia. It was grateful to the High Commissioner and her staff for their splendid efforts and assured UNHCR of its continuing support. It also appealed to the international community to respond promptly to ongoing refugee-producing situations in Africa, particularly in Angola.

65. Mr. de JONGE (Council of Europe), announcing that a memorandum of understanding updating the 1952 Cooperation Agreement between UNHCR and the Council of Europe had been signed on 4 October 1999, said that the establishment of a UNHCR office in Strasbourg was to be welcomed as a concrete step to facilitating day-to-day consultation and coordination on a wide range of issues of common interest.

66. At its recent part-session in September 1999, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had elected the first European Commissioner on Human Rights, Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, whose main task would be to promote human rights protection in the Council's 41 member States. The excellent working relations established both at headquarters and in the field between UNHCR and the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography enabled parliamentarians to obtain first-hand information on refugee problems in Europe with a view to formulating policy measures and had proved particularly useful during the Assembly's recent fact-finding missions to Croatia, Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo. In that connection, he noted that, on 23 September 1999, the Parliamentary Assembly had adopted recommendation No. 1424 on the evaluation of the humanitarian situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, particularly in Kosovo and Montenegro, in which it had expressed deep appreciation for the efficiency and devotion of UNHCR and other agencies involved in the Kosovo refugee crisis and urged all member States to contribute generously to humanitarian efforts in the region.

67. At the intergovernmental level, the Council of Europe had set up a programme for the stability of south eastern Europe and was contributing actively to the work of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The Council's offices in Pristina, Sarajevo and Tirana were cooperating closely with UNHCR and other international organizations.

68. The Council's Committee of Ministers, had recently adopted legal texts on a number of subjects relating to asylum and refugee protection, including guidelines on the application of the "safe third country" concept; the right to an effective remedy by rejected asylum-seekers against decisions on expulsion; the training of officials coming into contact with asylum-seekers, in particular at border points; and conclusions on the treatment of persons having fled from Kosovo. The Council was also working in close cooperation with UNHCR on issues of temporary protection, family reunion for refugees and other persons in need of international protection and the situation of refugee women in Europe. It was also taking an active part in the follow-up process initiated in 1996 by a conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and neighbouring States. With regard to questions of nationality, fruitful cooperation with UNHCR had taken place in connection with the formulation of essential principles such as the prevention of statelessness, non-discrimination and respect for the rights of persons habitually resident in the territories concerned.

69. Noting that the fiftieth anniversary of UNHCR would coincide with that of the European Convention on Human Rights, he drew attention to the importance of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, which had tended to focus increasingly on refugee issues in recent years. The relevant decisions of the Court should be taken into account by States when drafting legislation on such issues.

70. Mr. KANANURA (Rwanda), expressing his Government's appreciation of the support it had received from UNHCR and the High Commissioner personally for its reconstruction and national reconciliation efforts, said that the funds earmarked for programmes for the reintegration of returnees and displaced

persons fell considerably short of what was required, especially for the construction of shelters and infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and drinking water supply.

71. Rwanda, which had been devastated by war, genocide and massacres in 1994, had seen over 3 million refugees return in the past five years. Hundreds of thousands of persons inside the country were still living in the most precarious conditions. He appealed once again for the international community's continued support for programmes for the social and economic reintegration of all those persons; UNHCR's withdrawal from such activities had left a void and enormous needs still to be met. Additional resources were required to support Rwanda's programmes for the repatriation of tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees still living abroad, particularly in neighbouring countries. Rwanda also urgently needed international assistance to cope with the 40,000 or so refugees it was hosting from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo pending their repatriation once the situation in those countries had been stabilized. He welcomed the international community's efforts to resolve internal and inter-State conflicts through peaceful negotiations and appealed to those countries which still had Rwandan refugees on their soil to cooperate with Rwanda's Government of National Unity in repatriating them and in disarming the Interahamwe militias and other groups still intent on using innocent refugees for their own genocidal purposes.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.